

AMERICAN BEAUTYBERRY

Callicarpa americana L.
plant symbol = CAAM2

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Alternate names

Beautyberry (*Callicarpa* means “beautyberry”), French mulberry, American mulberry, wild goose’s berries

Uses

Ethnobotanic: The roots, leaves and branches of the American beautyberry were used by the Alabama, Choctaw, Creek, Koasati, Seminole and other Native American tribes for various medicinal purposes. The roots, leaves and branches were made into a decoction that was used in sweat baths to treat both malarial fevers and rheumatism. The boiled plant parts were poured into a big pan that was placed near the patient inside a sweathouse. A similar decoction of the roots was used to treat dizziness and stomachaches. The roots of *Callicarpa americana* were boiled with roots from *Rubus spp.* to make an infusion to treat dysentery. The roots and berries were boiled and drunk to treat colic. The bark from the stems and roots was used to treat itchy skin. A tea from the root bark was taken to treat urine retention or “urine stopped-up sickness.”

Wildlife: The fruits of American beautyberry are an important food source for many species of birds including bobwhite quails, mockingbirds, robins, towhees, and brown thrashers. Animals that eat the fruit include armadillos, raccoons, wood rats, gray

foxes, opossums, and white-tailed deer. The long-lasting fruits provide food for birds and animals well into the winter months when other food-sources are unavailable.

Other: Beautyberry shrubs are raised for their ornamental flowers as well as their colorful clusters of fruits.

Status

Please consult the PLANTS Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant’s current status (e.g. threatened or endangered species, state noxious status, and wetland indicator values).

Description

General: Vervain Family (Verbenaceae). American beautyberry is a native, perennial shrub. These small, deciduous shrubs reach from 1 to 2 m in height. The leaves are opposite, elliptical to ovate in shape (7 to 15 cm long) and have saw-toothed margins. The under-side of the leaves can be covered with white or rust-colored woolly hairs. The inconspicuous blue, violet, pink, or white flowers are borne in axillary clusters that bloom from late spring to early summer. The flowers are funnel-shaped with four clefs. The round, showy, violet or magenta drupes or fruits are 4-5 mm in diameter. The very juicy fruits, containing from 2 to 4 seeds, begin to ripen in August or September. These colorful fruits remain on the shrubs long after the leaves drop.

Distribution: For current distribution, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Web site.

Habitat: American beautyberry shrubs occur in dry open woods, moist woods, thickets and hammocks. They occur as understory species in upland pine forests, upper slope pine-oak forests and old-growth maritime forests. These shrubs are adapted to climates with hot, humid summers and moderate winters.

Establishment

These shrubs may be propagated by softwood cuttings, but they are primarily grown from seed. The seeds do not require pretreatment for germination. The many volunteers that this plant produces are very hearty and can be dug up and transplanted elsewhere in a more desirable location. The plants do well in partial shade and sunny locations in well-drained soils. The shrubs have a

denser habit and produce more fruit in sunny locations.

Management

This plant can produce abundant volunteers from the many seeds that drop to the soil. The flowers are produced on new growth, so prune plants after the fruits are gone to increase the next year's growth and berry production. The plants can take a hard pruning and may be pruned to the ground level in the winter if desired.

Cultivars, Improved and Selected Materials (and area of origin)

These plant materials are somewhat available from commercial sources. The white-fruited *C. Americana* var. *lacteal* is available from specialty nurseries.

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